

R.G. HACKETT

South African War books. An illustrated bibliography of English language publications relating to the Boer War of 1899-1902

London: P.G. de Lotz (Privately printed)

1994

x + 205 pp. 310 x 220 mm

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With the centenary of the outbreak of the South African War in 1999 approaching (or was it the Anglo-Boer War, the Boer War, the English War, or the Second War of Independence?) interest in this war by way of publications becomes increasingly apparent.

This book, compiled by Ronald Hackett and published by P.G. de Lotz of London, is by far one of the most attractive publications yet on the South African War. As the sub-title suggests, it is an illustrated bibliography of and comprehensive guide to English language publications up to 1920 which relate to the war of 1899-1902. One is immediately struck by the great number of English publications on the war up to that date.

The compiler began collecting what he calls Boer War books in the early sixties after reading Rayne Kruger's fascinating account of the war, *Good-Bye Dolly Gray*. In 1969 Hackett registered a bookselling firm called "Boer War Books" and embarked on his first catalogue. Six years later he sold the business to Messrs. Wright and Lloyd. He himself has since concentrated on bookselling in order to contribute to collections in Britain and abroad.

With this book, Mr. Hackett, drawing on his extensive collection and other sources, has produced an important reference work, embracing general histories, regimental records, official publications, personal accounts and numerous other items, many privately printed. What makes it so attractive is that over 200 reproductions of covers and title pages are included in the first 122 pages, approximately a quarter of them printed in colour.

The pictorial section is derived from a full range of contemporary publications. Mr. Hackett admits that he is fascinated by period bindings, many of which, he says, are fine examples of design. He adds that the elegance of *A military history of Perthshire* (p. 99) or *The work of the Ninth Division* (p. 43) is in stark contrast to the crude typography of *Letters from South Africa 1900-1901* (p. 33) and *69th Battery R.F.A.* (p. 59), yet all are typical of the era. Other notable examples he includes are *Souvenir of the siege of Mafeking* (p. 97) and *On the heels of De Wet* (p. 91) both with covers strongly evocative of the war years.

Let us take a verbatim example of one of the books featured on p. 2 of the pictorial section (that is to say, below a clear colour picture of the cover):

London To Ladysmith Via Pretoria
Winston Spencer Churchill
Longmans, Green and Co.
London 1900

Khaki cloth. Front blocked in black and red. Spine blocked in red and gold.
197 x 140mm

A correspondent's experiences in South Africa during the first five months of war described in a series of letters addressed to the *Morning Post* newspaper from Oct. 1899 to March 1900. The author recounts his capture near Estcourt, his period of imprisonment at Pretoria and subsequent escape to Delagoa Bay. Thereafter the correspondence concerns the campaign in Natal and operations for the relief of Ladysmith. The narrative is continued in a second volume entitled *Ian Hamilton's March** being letters to the same newspaper from March to June 1900. The latter volume relates to the campaign in the Orange Free State and the advance from Bloemfontein to Pretoria. (*Not illustrated)

xiv + 498 pp. Various maps and plans, some folding.

Mr. Hackett relies heavily on information from Mendelssohn's *South African bibliography* and *A South African bibliography to the year 1925* (SABIB).

Publications covered in the bibliography not illustrated (pp. 124-203) are treated more briefly than the ones included in the pictorial section. One example may suffice (p. 175):

Peel (Hon. Sidney) — Trooper 8008 I.Y.
Edward Arnold
London 1902 (6th Impression)
xi + 168 pp. Map and illustrations.
230 x 148 mm
Experiences of a volunteer in the 40th (Oxfordshire) Co. Imperial Yeomanry.
Impressions 1-5 published 1901.

Of course the reviewer tried to catch the compiler out by checking whether perhaps some of the more obscure publications were excluded. Three I checked were there, a fourth not. C.W. van der Hoogt's *The story of the Boers* (New York/London 1900) was included, and so were George W. van Sicken's *American sentiment. A plebiscite upon the Boer War* (New York 1900?), and E. Neethling's *Should we forget?* (Cape Town 1903?). Not included was E.J. Hardy's *Mr. Thomas Atkins* (Second impression, London 1900).

One can find fault with the fact that the pictorial section is not arranged alphabetically. Fortunately these publications are to be found in the bibliography section listed alphabetically according to author. A second objection is that the list of abbreviations on p. 123 is likewise not in alphabetical order.

When treating Philip Pienaar's *With Steyn and De Wet* the compiler mentions with a question mark that Mendelssohn lists a 1900 Methuen edition (p. 176). This could not have been possible. According to O.J.O. Ferreira's *Viva os Boers! Boeregeïnterneertes in Portugal tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902* (Pretoria, 1994), Philip Pienaar was captured in Mozambique along with other burghers in September 1900; in 1901 they were sent to Portugal where they were interned for the rest of the war. While in Portugal, Pienaar wrote his book which was published in Dutch in Middelburg (the Netherlands) in 1902. An English edition in 1900 could not have been possible, but probably appeared after the Dutch edition (but also in 1902).

South African War books is a very attractive publication. It has a buckram binding with a coloured dustjacket and a page size of 310 x 220 mm. The glossy paper is Premier Super Velvet 150

gsm, and the first edition comprises 1 200 copies. Special copies bound in quarter goatskin with a buckram covered slipcase are available to order at £125 sterling (in comparison with the price of the standard edition of £65 sterling).

This book is a must for libraries and all collectors of Boer War (South African War/Anglo-Boer War) material. It will become valuable Africana. For once South African collectors should forget about the value of the Rand.

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